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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [IZ](#) [LE](#) [QA](#)
SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR VISIT OF ASSISTANT TO THE
PRESIDENT FRANCES TOWNSEND TO QATAR

Classified By: Ambassador Chase Untermeyer, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Embassy Doha is pleased to welcome you to Qatar. This is your third visit here, and the most senior USG visit since Secretary Gates met the Amir in January 2007. Your meetings

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can help define the tone of bilateral engagement on a range of issues over the coming 18 months, help strengthen our intelligence cooperation, and mark our concerns about Qatari diplomacy with organizations such as Hamas and Hizballah.

¶2. (S) Although our military relationship with Qatar remains solid, at the political level things have steadily soured and intelligence cooperation is poor. Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Hamad bin Jassim Al Thani (HBJ) has grown increasingly jealous of our relationships with his regional rivals and annoyed that we don't give him the attention he feels he deserves, including senior-level visits and visibility in our own regional initiatives. (State and NSC have both opposed inviting the Amir to meet the President, feeling that this would appear to reward bad behavior.) HBJ and the Amir may be waiting out the Administration hoping that things improve in 18 months. In the meantime, Qatar's extraordinary wealth and CENTCOM's dependence on Al-Udeid may only feed their hubris and sense that we need them more than they need us.

¶3. (C) We have requested meetings with Amir Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani and the Heir Apparent, Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani. (We may also seek a separate meeting with the head of Qatar State Security.) You met with the Amir and Sheikh Tamim on your June 2005 trip, which you made at the President's direction to seek greater cooperation from Qatar on counter-terrorism issues. You met again with Sheikh Tamim that September when you returned to thank Qatar for its rendition of Dwight Thompson, a U.S. citizen fugitive with a felony conviction in the State of New York who was living with other Muslim converts in Doha.

¶4. (S) Beyond your discussion on CT, a useful message would be that our current concerns - not just poor intelligence cooperation, but also Qatar's engagement with Syria, the pro-Syrian factions in Lebanon, and Hamas) are antagonizing governments in the region with which the U.S. has important relationships, isolating Qatar politically, and potentially frustrating our own regional political efforts. As long as that continues, relations with this or any future U.S. administration are unlikely to improve.

Regional Foreign Policy

15. (C) Qatar's wealth and its leaders' ambitions have fueled an assertive foreign policy increasingly out of step with our own regional efforts and those of our other allies. Qatar's continued ties with Hamas in the face of regional efforts to isolate the organization, continued relations with Syrian president Bashar al-Asad, and links to, and perceived support for, Hizballah have annoyed many regional governments - and very often the U.S. Many of Qatar's regional initiatives are rooted in its poor relationship with Saudi Arabia, which is strained by anti-Saudi programming on Al Jazeera, a history of border issues, and Qatar's desire to emerge from the Kingdom's sphere of influence in the Gulf and be viewed as a progressive, outward-looking alternative to what they regard as Saudi Arabia's backwardness.

Iran

16. (S) Qatari officials privately express concern about Iran's role in the region and its pursuit of nuclear weapons (which they believe is unstoppable). They agree with our analysis of Iran's revolutionary motivations and goals and note Iran's active support for subversive elements in the region. Qatar regards Iran as its major existential threat and fears - probably correctly - that it could face violent retaliation in the event of U.S.-Iran military conflict. But since they share with Iran the world's largest field of non-associated natural gas - the source of much of their future wealth - Qatar is reluctant to do anything to antagonize the Iranian government. Meanwhile, Qatar may harbor suspicions that the U.S. has plans for Iran, whether military or diplomatic, that we are not sharing with the

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Qataris, forcing the GOQ to make its own calculations.

17. (C) At the May 24, 2007 bilateral Gulf Security Dialogue (GSD) we raised HBJ's recent declaration that "Qatar would not serve as the base for any military operation against Iran." While acknowledging that the U.S. has no intention of launching military action against Iran at this time, we noted the tactical value of maintaining ambiguity around the question as a disincentive to Iran's aggressive posture in the region. Our Qatari interlocutor accepted the point and said he would aim to steer his government away from similar declarations in the future.

Iraq

18. (C) Qatar has shown support for our efforts in Iraq (and Afghanistan and the Horn of Africa) by allowing unimpeded combat missions out of Al Udeid Air Base. The Amir shares our view that restoration of order and a successful democratic transition are of paramount importance not only to Iraq but to the region. However, a feeling that its efforts over the past three years are not fully appreciated in Washington, which excludes Qatar from regional Iraq-related diplomacy, along with a distaste for Iraq's Shia-dominated government, drives Qatar's resistance to follow through on some of our priorities, including comprehensive debt forgiveness. While HBJ has expressed concerns about civil war in Iraq, he has also stated publicly that the coalition needs to stay in the country to establish wider security. (The GOQ is not prepared to open an embassy in Baghdad until the security situation improves dramatically.)

UN Security Council

19. (C) The Qataris have been exasperating during their 18

months on the Security Council. (Like the U.S., they look forward to the end of Qatar's term this December.) When it serves their interests, Qatar sees itself as holding the Arab seat, claiming it must give regional interests priority over broader international security concerns. This has led to counterproductive Qatari behavior on Lebanon, the Palestinians, Sudan, and Iran, including its 14 to 1 consensus-breaking UN Security Council vote on Resolution 1696 in July. (Since then, however, Qatar has been part of two unanimous votes, UNSCR 1736 and UNSCR 1747, to impose sanctions on Iran's nuclear program.) On several occasions, Qatar has voted against our wishes (and often against a broad international consensus) even on issues such as Burma where it has no obvious interests. Neither has Qatar been particularly helpful outside of the Council's doors: In the 1267 Committee, it has blocked the terrorist listing of three Kuwaiti individuals, despite evidence of their ties to al-Qaida, at Kuwait's request. The one recent bright spot has been Qatar's support for our position in favor of an independent Kosovo.

U.S.-Qatari Military Relations

¶10. (S) Bilateral military relations are generally excellent. Qatar hosts approximately 9,000 U.S. forces, some 100 U.S. and Coalition aircraft, as well as the CENTCOM Forward Headquarters and the Combined Air Operations Center. Qatar had no objection to stationing B1 bombers and Patriot missile batteries, signed onto the PSI principles, and at no time in conversations with U.S. officials has the Qatari leadership warned the U.S. against using Al Udeid Air Base in any direct conflict with Iran. Recent mil-mil problems, particularly customs clearance delays for military cargo, had threatened to degrade U.S. operational readiness. These problems, however, have largely been confined to the working level, are being resolved through CENTCOM-GOQ engagement, and have thus far not bled into the larger political relationship.

Counterterrorism Finance

¶11. (SBU) The Qatar Authority for Charitable Works monitors all domestic and international charitable activities and

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approves international fund transfers by the charities. The Authority has primary responsibility for monitoring overseas charitable, developmental, and humanitarian projects, and reports annually to government ministries on their status. Qatar has a Financial Information Unit that resides in the Qatar Central Bank; both entities can review suspect accounts. Local banks work with the Central Bank and the FIU on counterterrorism finance and anti-money laundering issues, and bank officials attend U.S.-sponsored conferences on these subjects. The Embassy's relations with the FIU have been good and we are offering the GOQ training on bulk cash smuggling.

Al Jazeera

¶12. (C) Though its coverage of Qatar itself is minimal, Al Jazeera is by far Qatar's - and the region's - most prominent media outlet and the bane of many governments in the region. The network is now ten years old with an Arabic-speaking audience of some 50 million viewers. In November 2006 it launched an English-language edition with a potential audience of 70 million and ambitions to compete with the major U.S. and British satellite networks worldwide.

¶13. (U) Since early last year, the USG has seen a bumpy downward trend in inflammatory anti-Western bias and

inaccuracy in Al Jazeera's content. Al Jazeera has increased its use of U.S. government sources, limited its use of inflammatory terminology, and devoted more time to stories of interest in the region other than the U.S. role in Iraq. However, Al Jazeera's track record remains far from acceptable. Unprofessional, biased, and inaccurate reporting continues to appear on its newscasts, talk shows, and website. The USG objects to Al Jazeera's practice of airing terrorist-provided video tapes, though the terrorists increasingly prefer to use the internet to release these videos unedited.

Political Reform

¶14. (U) Qatar's own program of reform, launched by the Amir after he assumed power in 1995, could take a significant step forward when the government eventually holds first-time elections for its national legislature. Qatar has gone slow, seeking to establish an institution that reflects local social and political norms. The current sticking points are who will be able to vote (likely a fraction of Qatar's 186,000 citizens) and who may stand for office. HBJ "hopes" that parliamentary elections will be held in 2008. Qatar's continual delay in announcing these elections may be the result of seeing how an elected parliament in Kuwait, strongly populated by Islamists, has worked against reforms initiated by the ruler. Qatari women have had the right to vote since the first election took place in the country in 1999, for the Central Municipal Council. Elections for the country's third municipal council took place April 1, and a woman was elected with the highest number of votes in any district.

Economy

¶15. (U) At over USD 60,000, Qatar's per capita income is ranked fifth in the world (and ahead of the U.S.). The country's vast wealth is a result of the successful development of its natural gas resources: Qatar is now the world's largest exporter of LNG. The country has plans for even greater expansion over the next five years, during which time exports will more than double. Qatar Petroleum is maximizing use of Qatar's natural resources to diversify the economy and provide business and employment opportunities to Qataris.

¶16. (C) Qatar is friendly to U.S. energy companies: Since 1999, there has been USD 60 billion in foreign investment in Qatar's energy sector with the majority about USD 40 billion coming from the U.S. firms, including Exxon Mobil, Conoco Phillips, Chevron, Anadarko, and Occidental. Qatar plans to invest USD 70 billion in the natural gas sector over the next seven years. Following the recent CFIUS approval of \$2.2

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billion development by Qatar Petroleum of the Golden Pass LBG terminal in southeast Texas, LNG exports to the U.S. should begin in 2009 and eventually amount to one-third of our LNG needs.

¶17. (U) The GOQ estimates Qatar's oil reserves at 27 billion barrels. Qatar's daily average production is currently estimated to be 806,000 barrels per day; at current production rates, oil reserves are expected to last 20 to 60 years, depending on estimates.

Education

¶18. (U) Qatar's commitment to modernize its educational system is exemplified by Education City, a 2500-acre campus

on the outskirts of Doha. Managed by Qatar Foundation, the umbrella organization chaired by the Amir's wife, Sheikha Mozah, Education City is home to five U.S. college branch campuses, with some 800 students currently enrolled. The majority (roughly 60%) are Qatari; others come from around the region and some from further beyond, including Bosnia and the U.S. About two-thirds of the students are women, since the Education City campuses allow them to live at home with their families. The National Defense University is considering locating a branch of its Near East-South Asia (NESA) Center in Doha. While far short of Sheikha Mozah's wish for a branch of West Point, "NESA Forward" would represent a step in the direction she wants Arab militaries to go.

CONCLUSION

¶19. (C) As a result of Qatar's actions in the region and on the Security Council, its relations with the U.S. have been rocky. However, the rifts are not irreparable, as there is a strong foundation - indeed, far stronger than with Arab countries considered better friends - in the form of our unlimited use of the Al Udeid Air Base, huge energy contracts, and a clear preference for U.S. universities and public school reform of the sort promoted by then-Governor Bush in Texas. Embassy Doha has always felt that high-level contact between the U.S. and Qatar will ease tensions in the bilateral relationship and that isolating Qatar has only had a negative effect on its behavior. Therefore, your visit as one of the President's closest aides can accomplish a great deal to put U.S.-Qatar ties on track.

¶20. (U) Minimize considered.

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